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and the things that shall be hereafter."

ART CRITICISM.

CRITICISM is something of which we hear so much, and which everybody who sees a picture so naturally indulges in, that it may be well to inquire whether there are any rules that should govern it, and what its foundations and just principles are. Criticism is not only a natural consequence of all art but it is a necessary concomitant to good art. The first picture ever painted must have provoked comparison to nature itself; and the second forced a comparison also with the first, and a judgment as to what art had accomplished and as to what it could yet do. Criticism is thus of importance to the artist as showing him whether he has done rightly, and,—for his shortcomings might make him almost despair,—as showing him whether his later picture is an advance upon his earlier, and what is his comparative rank among his fellow artists. The use of criticism in art, as in everything else, is to advance art. This is to be done by cool, considered, moderate judgments of the worth of works of art as answering the purposes of art, and as compared with the only recognized standard, nature. Faults should be pointed out and reprobated, beauties and excellences praised, without exaggeration and in the spirit of truth.

If criticism influences art, and if art can ever be improved by criticism it is necessary that critics be superior, or at

least equal to the artists. The critic should know enough to point out to the artist his errors and mistakes, and should have artist-feeling enough to be able to sympathize with the artist and enter into the spirit of his work. And first of the latter. As art is a representation of the beautiful, the person who undertakes to judge art should have his soul permeated with the spirit of beauty and truth. He must have so much love for nature herself and for humanity and its feelings and sufferings as to advance with the artist himself, perceive his intention, and feel the force of the subject expressed by him.

It is very necessary to justice that the critic should try and put himself in the position of the artist, and endeavor to look at the subject from the same point of view. For a mistaken idea as to the aim and purpose of a picture or statue will cause one to judge it wrongly and untruly.

While no man can rightly judge a work of art, as a whole, without this love of and instinctive feeling for the beautiful, yet it is possible without it to judge and to judge rightly of details. A shoe-maker for example may be able to criticise properly the drawing of a shoe, and be wholly at fault as to the design and object of the picture. And while a person with mere knowledge may be able to decide on the value of

the picture as an expression of truth, unless he has this love and knowledge of the beautiful he can tell us nothing as to whether the picture is *great*.

Yet knowledge is quite as important as love. For a person of strong feelings and vivid imaginings is able to see the beautiful idea, but cannot see the bad expression. An execrable daub may suggest to him what the artist meant to express, and he will have in his mind's eye the scene not as it is on the canvass, but glorified and exalted beyond the representation. He therefore cannot rightly speak as to its excellence as art. He sees the spirit apart from the form, as the man of mere knowledge sees the form but not the spirit.

The knowledge which is so necessary for the true critic is not mere dead knowledge of so-called rules of art, and of formal canons of criticism, but a living acquaintance with facts and principles. He should have above all things a familiar and intimate knowledge of nature, and not only a practical knowledge to be gained by observation and experience but also a scientific knowledge. Geology and Botany will never come amiss when added to experience. Without such an acquaintance with nature how can any one dare to pass judgment on a painting of a landscape as to its truth or fidelity? In addition to this comes the knowledge of the history of art, and an acquaintance with all extant great works, a knowledge of styles and of masters, of schools, and examples. Next to this comes a knowledge of such arts or sciences as underlie the fine arts and upon which they are dependent. Thus for a correct appreciation of sculpture one should know something of anatomy, rightly to judge architecture one should understand physics and the art of building.

A knowledge of materials, of colors and processes, and even a considerable practical experience in their use and in the modes of production is advisable, and often indispensable; for unless we are acquainted thoroughly with the limitations of art, we frequently blame the producer where the material was alone at fault; we ask for impossible effects and do not take into consideration that nature is infinite but art

finite. And if we may specially mention one thing more, for everything whether history, poetry, science or philosophy is of use to the critic, we should say that the meaning of the terms of art should be exactly known, and that they should be properly applied. In other words, before exercising the critical function one should learn the critical vocabulary.

But for all this the critic should not be an artist. The character of the artist or producer is entirely distinct from that of the critic or reflector. One uses reason where the other uses instinct. The artist's nature is internal, the critic's external. The artist doing that which he *feels* to be right can say that such and such a thing is good, but not why. He can affirm, but cannot reason. An artist as critic would be too apt to judge of other things by his own peculiar habits and methods and in accordance with his own peculiarities of style. He would be narrow-minded, whereas a real critic must have his mind broadened and enlarged by experience of all art.

But more than this, an artist could not speak with that independence and boldness which is one of the first requisites of a critic. No one could be so pure as to be utterly devoid of professional jealousy, or prejudice, or dislike. And even were he entirely unwarped and unbiased by friendship or prejudice, yet he could never exert an equal influence to an entirely unprofessional man, for suspicion would be sure to attach to all that he said. The critic must not only be, but must seem to be, above all personal influence of whatever sort. He has his duty which he owes to the public. And in its performance he will necessarily say many things which might perhaps offend those of his friends whose pictures came beneath his notice. What he has to say he must say without regard to the feelings of artists. His business is to criticise not men but their work. He is to be plain and sincere, and artists whose feelings are so tender as to be hurt by honest blame are not worth regarding. For, though sensibility is apt to produce sensitiveness, we hold that an artist is but as other men, and that no more allow-

ance is to be made to him for peculiar organization, than to any other author or producer. The critic must remember that what he has to do with is the picture and not the artist. While bestowing all his attention on the beauties and faults of the work he must not animadvert on the failings of its author. The critic is as a botanist with pictures for plants.

But the great mission of the critic is to teach the public to appreciate and regard art properly. The public exercise a great and controlling influence upon artists, and it is through the public that the critic has most influence upon art-work. The artists are a part of the public and to a certain extent share their feelings; and the law of demand and supply applies also to works of art. If the public art sentiment is debased, the art-productions will be destitute of merit. If the public appreciate what is true and good, artists will always appear who will endeavor to be truthful and faithful. The instruction of the public is then the great duty of the true critic, and by devoting himself to improving the public taste and knowledge, he in this way advances the cause of the beautiful and the true. In the performance of his duties it will be necessary for the critic to say many very disagreeable things. He must regard truth above all other considerations, and must say what he knows and feels to be true, even though he be charged with arrogance and self-conceit. It is only those that know the right and dare maintain it who bear influence for good in the world.

We are all willing to admit an ignorance of science, and ready to be guided by those who have studied and thought on scientific subjects. But in art, most persons think that they have eyes of their own, and judgment of their own, and are willing to recognize no authority and even no superior intelligence. We do not believe in following strictly authority in matters of art or anything else, but all men should be willing to respect the knowledge which comes by study and experience, enough to think and look closely for themselves. To those who either have followed blindly the teachings of ordinary art-writers and adopt-

ed without question the conventional rules of art, or who insist exclusively on their own judgment and knowledge, what is said by him who is studious only for truth will without doubt be unpleasant. They will be obliged to begin again at the elements of their art-knowledge and learn all over.

The critic must disregard great names, judging solely of the works of artists by those laws which are founded only in nature. He must not recognize any fictitious reputation even though strengthened by the respect and admiration of centuries. For while in literature works overpraised by contemporaries are usually rated at their true worth by posterity, it is not so in art. Pictures which in some way have gained a great reputation, being still exposed in the galleries of princes, are so bepraised by their imitators and the crowd of shallow admirers, that it is considered a mark of ignorance and of want of taste to dare question their beauty. It is the fashion to admire certain painters who are called the old masters. Let him beware who offends the reigning taste. It is a duty of the critic to pull down such false reputations, provided they can be proved to rest on no basis. And in doing so not even the dead should be spared. As false glory dazzles, it should be put out. As false reputation misleads, it should be destroyed.

But while the critic is severe and earnest about what is wrong, he should praise and revere what is good. It is his privilege to add what he can to names already lustrous, if rightly so. If he discovers worth and greatness, whether known or unknown, he must praise and encourage it till others see and believe also. If he must pull down what is false, he must build up for others a reputation and a name which is true.

But criticism must not be made in a spirit of fault finding and disparagement. Let the critic blame where he must but praise where he can. Approbation ought to be more congenial to him than censure. Let him be charitable and not unkindly even when he disapproves. He may be severe, but he should not be petulant nor malicious. He must always remember that it is the advance of art which is his object, and his criticism must only

have that end. And that style of judgment which reasons and explains is more convincing and authoritative than that which only asserts, whatever may be the influence and power of its author.

It will probably be admitted by nearly every one that there are few critics who come up to the standard which we have set up. No one can on reflection be thoroughly satisfied with the prevalent style of judging and speaking of works of art. Artists themselves cannot, unless their food is flattery and they are become unwilling to hear candid judgments. The more intelligent of the public should not be contented with that from which they learn nothing, and from which they gain scarcely any intelligible ideas. Almost without exception the criticism which is published in our newspapers and journals is shallow, ignorant and partial. We know of but one paper where the notices of pictures are usually worth the paper they are printed on. The proprietors of journals are careful in the selection of their contributors who write on finance or military affairs or literature; but they receive and publish the productions of any one who can write pleasantly on art and who has some familiar acquaintance with artists and their studios—it matters not if he has a total ignorance of all that concerns the work spoken of, and is able to give no other opinions than those suggested by the artist himself. We have in mind one paper in this city, professing a great interest in literature and art, whose regular art-critic was a picture-broker. As might be expected, he praised up those pictures and those artists that he had an interest in to the exclusion and detriment of others. We hope, however, that the proprietors were not then aware that he was making their journal the medium of advertising his wares.

It is perhaps difficult, and certainly unpleasant for criticism to be impartial here. The contributors to the press are well known, and as art and literature are intimately connected, they have many associations with artists. Writers would perhaps refrain from speaking in terms of censure of the works of their acquaintances; and

artists are often so unreasonable as to suppose that every one who condemns their work is actuated by malice or ill-feeling. A threatened loss of friendship prevents, and to our knowledge has prevented a just and fair criticism, and the critic is either silent about a picture which he disapproves of, or even speaks well of it.

We do not wish to make mere assertions. Let any one who reads an article on art or on a picture think and investigate, and he will soon find whether much knowledge of the subject is shown. We remember seeing in an evening paper, in an article written by one who is considered by some the best of our art-critics to prove that great poets always preceded great painters, the statements that Dante preceded Giotto—that Goldsmith preceded Gainsborough, that Wordsworth and Shelley both anticipated Turner. It is surprising that any one should make such statements, for every one knows that Dante and Giotto were bosom friends—that Goldsmith's poems were published when Gainsborough was reaching the zenith of his reputation. The growth of Wordsworth's and Turner's powers was almost simultaneous and some of Turner's greatest pictures were painted at about the same time that Shelley wrote his finest poems.

Another journal gravely advised its readers to buy engravings of the pictures of Theo. Hook, who was no artist but a humorous writer, and also of several *artists*, but from whose pictures unfortunately no engravings have ever been made. If critics considered good, make mistakes such as these, what must the inferior ones do? And if they thus err in matter of fact so easily ascertainable, what confidence can be placed in what else they say?

The notices of pictures which are published during the Exhibition of the Academy of Design, or after an Artist's Reception, are excellent examples of the prevailing style of criticism. There what seems especially desired is variety, and he who can discuss the greatest number of pictures with the most various epithets is the best critic. He will say that No. 1 is vigorous and effective; No. 2 is forcibly drawn; No. 3 is fresh and suggestive; No. 4 is marked

by great breadth of detail; the tone of No. 5 is very subdued; in No. 6 the artist has painted well the outside of the trunk but he has not given us the soul of the tree; and so on through the catalogue. There is not the slightest attempt to tell us what all this means or to give any reasons for such vague statements.

Technical terms of art are constantly abused and misused; none more frequently than *breadth* and *tone*. Breadth is sometimes made to mean distinctness of form, at others indistinctness and suggestiveness. Tone is properly the gradation of the tints in the picture; and a picture is in tone or rightly toned when it has the same gradation of lights and darks as is observed in nature. Tone is the relation of the parts of the picture, and is the same thing as the relation of one note to another in music. But as used by ordinary writers tone seems to have some relation to color, while in many instances it is impossible to tell what is meant by its use. If nothing else can be said about a picture, one can say its tone is disagreeable.

Greater knowledge and better application of terms is needed for good criticism, and also greater preliminary knowledge of facts. We once heard a critic of a daily paper say: "There is something wrong about that picture. Those cows are either badly drawn or badly painted, I can't tell which." If this person had looked a little at cows in the living state before attempting to decide, his judgment would probably have been sounder.

Another great fault in criticism is to judge of a picture by the emotions and thoughts which it excites. The feelings which a work of art produces may serve to illustrate and explain some particular statement with regard to it, but ought never to be considered a sufficient test of its merit. The association of ideas is dependent on the

slightest circumstances; and if there be one well drawn or well colored object in a picture which suggests a train of thought and fancy in harmony with the subject, is the whole picture therefore good?

It is a very false and wrong method of criticism to blame one thing for not being another. But it is a common thing to find fault with a work of art because it is not of a kind or style which it was never intended to be. It is a last resource to say, "Yes it is all very well, but what would Turner have done," or "how very differently would Mr. Church have painted this."

And the most contemptible mode of criticism is the invention and use of ludicrous epithets and comparisons, as to say that A.'s picture is like a piece of calico, or B.'s church is like a piece of beefsteak. To sacrifice truth to an epigram is always an act of injustice. Anything which is ridiculous is always remembered, and will cause persons to discover faults when they saw none before. This is a misuse of criticism.

Literary ability is not a mark of critical ability. Fluency of language and ease of recording opinion does not add to their worth. Better a just criticism in crude English, than a hasty or ill found judgment expressed in an elegant style.

Having set thus high the standard of a true critic, we may be accused of arrogance if we ourselves undertake to pass judgment on the works of artists. We can only say that whenever we criticise we shall endeavor to be strictly impartial and have in view only the truth. Our knowledge may be limited and our judgment feeble, but we shall try to speak plainly of what we do know, and to investigate what we do not. The common sense of the reader is what we appeal to for the correctness of our decisions. The higher we aim, the nearer we shall probably come to the mark.